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## THE RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY OF BYZANTIUM IN ARMENIA DURING THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES\*

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The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) created such a rift between the Byzantine and Armenian churches, between the Armenians and the Greeks, that it was impossible to resolve the issue during the entire existence of Byzantium. Indeed, it was the monophysite-dyophysite controversy, starting in the fifth century, that caused mutual intolerance and conflict between the two neighboring countries. This is understandable; the controversy, cloaked in religious robes, had deeper political and cultural roots. Beginning in the ninth century, when the subjugation of Armenia had become the order of the day for the Byzantine Empire, the aforesaid issue emerged quite naturally. Byzantium was Chalcedonian; Armenia was monophysite. This circumstance could not fail to cause difficulties to confront the Empire, which for a long time had decided to establish itself there. Since Byzantium had no thought of accepting monophysitism, nor did it feel it desirable to adopt a middle course, there remained only one course: to make every effort to convert Armenia to Chalcedonianism. So the Empire started working toward that end. On the surface the issue was religious; thus, the effort was headed by the religious leaders of Byzantium. The patriarch Photius had already made a serious effort in that direction. From the surviving letter of 862, written by him to prince Ašot, we

\* Haġ Berbérian treated at length these relations for the eleventh century, «Hayoc<sup>c</sup> kat'otikosakan at'orin barjumə 11rd darun erkrord kēsin (Die Enthebung des armenischen Katolikosatsitzes in der Zweiten Hälfte des XI. Jahrhunderts)», *HA* (1967), nos. 4-6, cols. 145-160, nos. 7-9, cols. 327-346.

learn about Armenians in Fourth Armenia and Tarōn, who had accepted «orthodoxy» (i.e., Chalcedonianism) [καὶ τῶν Ἀρμενίων τοὺς ὀρθοδοξήσαντας δευτέρᾳ πάλιν σταλεῖσα ἐπιστολή, τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν Τετάρτην Ἀρμενίαν Ταρρωνίτας], and to whom Photius had sent two letters (1). Photius had also a series of letters written to the same Armenian prince of princes Ašot, and to catholicos Zak'aria, again on the doctrinal issue (2).

The work started by Photius was enthusiastically continued by the patriarch of Constantinople, Nicholas Mystikos, who sent a few letters to the Armenian king Smbat and catholicos Yovhannēs of Drasxanakert (3). The original Greek text of those letters has been preserved, and the catholicos mentions them in his history (4). During the reign of emperor Romanos I Lecapenos, Byzantium was carrying on an intense correspondence even with the religious heads of far-off Siwnik', probably with the thought of gaining support there against the Bagratids. The letter written by the aforesaid emperor to the Armenian bishop of Siwnik' has been preserved (5).

The Empire gained some success in Siwnik'; to the point even that in the ninth province of Siwnik', Balac', Vahan of Siwnik', having become catholicos, 968-969, «was willing to write of amity and satisfaction with Chalcedonianism» (6). When a religious conference was

(1) J. Darrouzès, «Deux lettres inédits de Photios aux Arméniens», *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, XXIX (1971), p. 147.

(2) See *Girk' t'lt'oc'*, Tiflis, 1901, pp. 279-294, also *Palestinskii Sbornik*, 31 (1892), pp. 179-294. «Letter of Patriarch Photius to Catholicos Zak'aria of the Armenians, Concerning the Union of Two Natures into One of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and Concerning the Correctness of the Council of the Holy Fathers Convened in Chalcedon», N. Akinean, *HA* (1968), nos. 1-3, cols. 61-100, «Copy of the Letter of Patriarch Photius of Constantinople to Prince of Princes Ašot,» N. Akinean, *HA*, (1968), nos. 10-12, cols. 439-450; «Response to the Paper of Photius Written to Prince of Princes Ašot of the Armenians», N. Akinean, *HA* (1968), nos. 10-12, cols. 451-472, all three articles in Armenian.

(3) H. M. Bart'ikian, «101st and 139th Letters of Nicholas Mystikos, Patriarch of Constantinople, Addressed to Hovhannes Drasxanakert'ci and to King Smbat I», *PBH*, (1966), no. 4, pp. 251-256, in Armenian.

(4) *Catholicos Yovhannēs Drasxanakert'ci, Patmut'wn Hayoc'*, Tiflis, 1912, reprint, Delmar, New York, 1980, pp. 280-282.

(5) J. Darrouzès, «Un recueil épistolaire byzantin. Le manuscrit de Patmos 706», *Revue des Études Byzantines*, XIV (1956), p. 115.

(6) *Asolkan patmut'wn tiezerakan*, Step'anos Tarōnec'ci, St. Petersburg, 1885, p. 181.

convened in Ani to oppose him, Vahan escaped to Vaspurakan where probably there were Chalcedonian sympathizers (7).

The doctrinal arguments between Armenian and Greek doctors became frequent; they arose as canonical issues in the capital city of Byzantium, and were engaged in by lay leaders as well. Perhaps a clergyman went to Constantinople during the reign of John I Tzimiskes: «The Armenian vardapet (Pandaleon) spoke to all the philosophers of Constantinople (*Horomoc'*) in the presence of the king» (8).

During the later years of the reign of Basil II, the vardapet Samuel of Kamrjajor went to Constantinople at the emperor's invitation, where Basil II «established... a forum for him to speak to the Greek doctors of theology» (9). Jacob of Sanahin or of K'arabin (10), Gagik II Bagratid (11), Gagik Abas (12), Grigor Magistros (13), Prince Atrnerseh of Bagrewand (14), and others held similar debates in Constantinople. Written correspondence on doctrinal matters were also lively (15).

The religious issue was very delicate during the Middle Ages, especially since the controversy between the monophysites and the dyophysites was very keen. Armenians considered the Greeks to be heretical (16). Anania of Narek even had an order promulgated «to rebaptize... one who was baptized as a Chalcedonian» (17). And for Byzantines, Armenians were heretical («the heretical inhabitants of Iberia, Mesopotamia, all the way to Lykandos and Melitene, and adjacent Armenia (18)»). As the Armenian catholicos Xaç'ik (973-992) wrote in a letter directed to the metropolitan of Sebasteia, «at the beginning of your letter, and many times subsequently, you have labeled us heretical (19)». Emperor Romanus III, observing the Black Moun-

(7) *Ibid.*, p. 182.

(8) Matt'ēos Urhayec'i (Matthew of Edessa), *Žamanakagrut'iwn*, Vałarša-pat, 1898, p. 28.

(9) *Ibid.*, p. 44.

(10) *Ibid.*, pp. 161, 227.

(11) *Ibid.*, pp. 163-178.

(12) *Ibid.*, p. 138.

(13) *Ibid.*

(14) *Ibid.*

(15) *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 44.

(16) Matt'ēos Urhayec'i, *Žamanakagrut'iwn*, p. 96.

(17) Step'anos Tarōnec'i. *Patmut'iwn*, p. 178.

(18) 'Ε.Θ. Τσολάκη, 'Η Συνέχεια τῆς Χρονογραφίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτση, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1968, σελ. 141.

(19) Step'anos Tarōnec'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 203.

tain monastics holding to the Armenian doctrine, put the following question, «What is that crowd of heretics?» (20).

Under such circumstances the task of the Empire's planned subjugation of Armenia had become quite difficult; she was forced to conduct flexible diplomacy with the Armenians. However, not all the emperors were conscious of this matter. Basil II had carried on a relatively flexible diplomacy. The positive attitude expressed toward him in Armenian sources attests to this. «Great king Basil of the Romans», wrote Paul of Tarōn, «all that analysis of yours regarding faith is not made for Armenians» (21). While according to Aristakes of Lastivert Basil II and the emperors preceeding him «displayed guardianship toward our nation, which was under them» (22). Of course, that does not mean that during the reign of the aforesaid emperor, Byzantium did not persecute those who held to the Armenian doctrine. During the early period of the reign of Basil II, as early as 979, the Byzantines «prohibited the call to church from the city of Sebasteia» (23), while in 986, «feminized pastors and the metropolitan of Sebasteia began to harass the Armenians about their faith, and having seized the priests began to torture them about their faith, and the head priest of Sebasteia was brought in chains before the king. And the archpresbyter Gabriel was tortured in prison and killed» (24).

It is clearly understandable that this condition existed not only in Sebasteia, but also in other regions where there were Armenians.

During the times of Basil II, and undoubtedly of emperors preceeding and succeeding him, those Armenians that accepted Chalcedonianism enjoyed advantages before the law over Armenian monophysites. To escape a judgement Vrvēi, the Tōndrakian, «promised to become dyophysite» (25). These circumstances, as well as force, yielded appreciable results for the Empire. For example, as a result of religious persecution the bishops Sion and John of Sebasteia and Lařisa «under the same metropolitans's pressure accepted the Council

(20) *Patmut'iwn Aristakisi Lastivertc'woy*, ed. K. N. Yuzbařyan, Erevan, 1963, p. 43.

(21) *T'ult' eranelwoyn Pawłosi Tarawnac'woy yalt'awl axoyean vardapeti anddēm T'ēop'isteay horom p'ilisop'ayin*, Constantinople, 1752, p. 273.

(22) Aristakes Lastivertc'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 43.

(23) Stepanos Tarōnec'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 202.

(24) *Ibid.*, p. 201.

(25) Aristakes Lastivertc'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 132.

of Chalcedon, breaking away from the unity of the Armenians» (26). Later in Constantinople, Yakobus of Sanahin, «gave in to the dual nature of Christ, and was converted to the side of the Romans (i.e., Byzantines); ... he wrote a discourse on the union of the Armenians and the Romans» (27).

Under similar circumstances Chalcedonian bishoprics began to grow like mushrooms in Armenia, emerging as centers working to the benefit of Byzantium (28). From this point of view, the bishopric established in the city of Vałaršakert, and working for the benefit of Byzantium, is very typical (29). It was fairly active in the early 20's of the eleventh century, during the Byzantine-Georgian War. The Armenian bishop Zak'aria, of Vałaršakert, who held to the Chalcedonian doctrine, not only served as a negotiator between Basil II and the Georgian king Giorgi, but even tried to delude the Georgian king to Basil's advantage, «probably deceiving Giorgi with his words» (30), while keeping Basil informed about the strength of Georgian military forces and their readiness for combat (31). It was not by chance that in the year 1000, Basil II, on a journey from Tarōn to Tayk', the route «of the army passed by the plain near the city of Vałaršakert» (32). And from there he went to Uxt'ik' (33).

Basil II had ties even with the Chalcedonian head abbot of the Armenian monastery at the foot of the Black Mountain in the region of far-off Antioch (34).

Basil II differed from the other emperors in religious matters in that, when necessary, he could win over the Armenians, temporarily ceasing his persecution of those who held to the Armenian doctrine, if that was diplomatically expedient. If in 979, or even 986, those

(26) Step'anos Tarōnec'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 202.

(27) Matt'ēos Urhayec'i, *Žamanakagrut'iwn*, pp. 161-162.

(28) See E. Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze des Byzantinischen Reiches*, Bruxelles, 1935, pp. 198-210. M. Thierry, «Notes de géographie historique sur Vaspourakan,» *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, xxxiv (1976), pp. 159-173.

(29) Probably established in the seventh century, «Nersēs, catholicos of Armenians, who was by birth from Tayk', who built Holy Mother-of-God of Vałaršakert,» see Yovhan Mamikonean, *Patmut'iwn Tarōnoy*, ed. Aš. Abrahamyan, Erevan, 1941, p. 280.

(30) Aristakes Lastivertc'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 36.

(31) *Ibid.*, p. 36.

(32) Step'anos Tarōnec'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 277.

(33) *Ibid.*, p. 278.

(34) Matt'ēos Urhayec'i, *Žamanakagrut'iwn*, p. 50.

holding to the Armenian doctrine were being persecuted, only 15 years later, when the subjugation of Tayk' had become an issue, and the emperor needed to win their support, he directed that the Armenians be allowed to be «outspoken in all matters concerning doctrine, and to sound the bells», in the Armenian churches of Sebasteia (35).

After Basil's death Byzantium's religious diplomacy in Armenia changed materially. Romanos III «through personal command directed the church of God to assume a new form» (36). He even conscripted into military service the monks from monasteries of the Black Mountain holding to the Armenian doctrine (37). The situation deteriorated even more after the subjugation of Armenia, when there was no longer any effort being made to win over Armenians; «When the Armenians were taken over by the Greeks», writes Matthew of Edessa, «he prevented any evil action by the Armenian nation; *they sat down to an examination of faith*, and through it rejected the battle arena and considered the Church of God established. They willingly retreated from battle with the Persians, and tried to hinder and divert all true believers in Christ from their belief...» (38).

While up until the subjugation of Armenia, the empire interacted with those who held to the Armenian doctrine, after the subjugation it stood in direct confrontation with the Armenian catholicate. Under conditions of proliferating Armenian sovereignty the catholicate was the principal unifying force of the Armenians. Byzantium could not fail to take that fact into account. For that very reason one of her first acts was to enhance the Armenian catholicate in Ani. If in 1045, immediately after the occupation of Ani, «of Armenia and Iberia,» the principal commander of the regional forces, Iasites, on arriving at his new capital city of Ani, «greatly honored the Patriarch Petros» (39), it is understandable, because of the latter's friendly acts toward Byzantium. But his immediate successor, Katakalon Kekaumenos, after one year, «did not show high honor to the patriarch» (40). Even more, catholicos Petros, the spiritual head of the Armenians, was removed from Ani, and sent to Aren, and from there to Constanti-

(35) Step'anos Tarōnec'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 276.

(36) Aristakes Lastivertc'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 43.

(37) *Ibid.*

(38) Matt'ēos Urhayec'i, *Zamanakagrut'iwn*, p. 136.

(39) Aristakes Lastivertc'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 63.

(40) *Ibid.*

nople, where, after being kept for three (or four) years, his permanent domicile was designated as the city of Sebasteia, because the Byzantine governor did not dare to allow him to return to Ani, fearing that he would «cause a rebellion in Ani» (41). After remaining in Sebasteia for two years catholicos Petros died. His successor, catholicos Xač'ik, Petros' nephew, was taken to Constantinople in the same manner by the Emperor, kept for three years, and then permitted to go to Tarnta canton, Second Armenia, «for he was ordered to live there» (42).

The catholicate of the Armenians was in this manner taken out of Armenia; its existence within the boundaries of Byzantium could not have any real significance for Armenians; Aristakes Lastivertc'i writes, «The heir to the See was taken away as captive and prisoner» (43).

The strength of the Armenian church sprang from its economic prosperity. Matthew of Edessa writes, «When catholicos Petros occupied the patriarchal throne in Armenia, it had holdings, granted by the Armenian kings, of 500 renowned, populated, and prosperous villages as well as 500 overseeing bishops in charge of 700 dioceses... and the patriarchal throne was not inferior to that of the kingdom of Armenia» (44). The historian also writes of the wealth of the Armenian church. Byzantium, in conquering Armenia, stripped the Armenian church of its land holdings. But that was not enough for the Empire. The Byzantines «made... an issue of the quantity of the wealth in gold and silver of His Holiness Petros, Catholicos of Armenians» (45). The Byzantine government succeeded in transferring those treasures of the Armenian catholicate in Constantinople that they discovered «in Sebasteia and in Armenia» (46).

After doing all this the Empire took another approach. It tried to make the Armenian catholicate subject to taxation. Aristakes Lastivertc'i writes, that the Romans «wished to impose taxes» on catholicos Xač'ik (47). Catholicos Xač'ik positively rejected this, saying, «it has not been thus from ancient times, and I shall not allow it» (48).

(41) *Ibid.*, p. 82.

(42) *Ibid.*

(43) *Ibid.*, p. 99.

(44) Matt'ēos Urhayec'i, *Žamanakagrut'iwn*, pp. 153-154.

(45) *Ibid.*, p. 137.

(46) Aristakes Lastivertc'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 82.

(47) *Ibid.*, p. 83.

(48) *Ibid.*



The persecution of those holding to the Armenian doctrine became intensified with new vigor, especially during the reign of emperor Constantine X Ducas, 1059-1067. He «conceived an evil plan wanting to take over and restrict the Patriarchal See of St. Gregory of the Armenians... and instituted persecution and imposed various examinations on the faith of the Armenian nation» (49).

The religious diplomacy of the Byzantine Empire had a negative impact not only on the Armenians, but also on the Greeks themselves. During that century the existing abyss between those of Armenian doctrine and the Chalcedonians became deeper and wider. Byzantium was unable to establish strong support in Armenia. It felt itself a foreigner in hostile territory, a fact that could not fail to have a fatal meaning during the period of the Turkish invasions.

*Translated from Armenian by Arra Avakian.*

(49) Matt'ēos Urhayec'i, *Žamanakagrut'iwn*, p. 138, cf. also pp. 160-1.